# RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:

## A TOOL FOR PEACE AND RESPECT IN CHICAGO AND BEYOND

### FRAMEWORK FOR THE GROUNDING PRINCIPLES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

For more than 40 years, our criminal justice system has over-relied on punishment, policing, incarceration and detention.

This has ushered in an age of mass incarceration marked by harsh and racially biased sentencing policies, internationally disproportionate incarceration rates and a variety of collateral consequences that have harmed our communities and schools.

In light of its negative impact, many across the political spectrum have begun to call for the reform of these policies. Government officials, policymakers, judges, principals and other leaders are all looking for alternatives to current punitive policies. This shift has been responsible for increasing interest in the concept of restorative justice among governmental institutions and nonprofit entities that previously supported harmful and oppressive criminal justice and school discipline policies.

We celebrate and are encouraged by the growth of interest in restorative justice. As this interest grows, questions as to what constitutes restorative justice and restorative practices will naturally emerge. Moreover, questions as to what restorative justice is from the outside have led us to take stock of its principles and values. In this process we found there were similar principles framing our motivation for practicing restorative justice. These are:

- A collective commitment to end our nation's overreliance on policing and punishment
- An awareness that Black, Brown and First Nation communities are most impacted by the harm of mass incarceration
- A conviction that the current criminal justice system creates instability and harms our communities
- An awareness that the entrance of criminal justice into our schools has harmed youth, altered teaching and learning, and damaged opportunities for community in schools
- An understanding and belief in the ability of people to change
- A commitment to empower people most impacted by harmful systems as leaders and change agents
- A belief that dignity and humanity should ground all our personal and institutional practices

The appended document declares the values we find essential to the practice of restorative justice. These principles are not intended to be universal, exhaustive or fixed. Rather, they intend to document what people committed to ending the overreliance on punishment and policing across the city of Chicago identify as key principles in building restorative justice in their work, community and educational sites.

We envision that the audience for this document will be diverse and will include restorative justice practitioners, those who are novices to the concept, stakeholders who are considering this approach, and the communities in which restorative justice is emerging.

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# THE GROUNDING PRINCIPLES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

**WE ENVISION RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

- as a relationship-building process that is responsive to needs
- will create safe environments that foster dignity, humanity, respect, agency, empathy and mutual well-being
- as preventative when the values of restorative justice are embraced by a community; restorative justice is not always reactionary or contingent on the existence of conflict
- recognizes the capability of those most impacted by conflict, especially youth, to lead the change
- as voluntary for all participants
- when addressing conflict, will acknowledge, learn from and repair harm and promote healing for all
- as inclusive, valuing that everyone has a story and a voice
- as grounded in “power with” not “power over”
- as a process focused on the community taking responsibility when harm occurs, rather than government and systematic responsibility
- centered by an understanding of and a commitment to practices and contexts that are anti-oppressive, including struggles to end racism, sexism, ableism, adultism, ageism, transphobia, heterosexism and other forms of privilege and domination
- with an understanding that interpersonal acts of violence are connected to structural violence and with the responsibility to boldly expose and address structural violence
- supported by adequate institutional resources to enable creation and sustainability of positive, supportive, non-punitive environments
- takes time and commitment from all community members in order to make long-standing, structural change
- as focused on carrying out and living the philosophy
- results in a paradigm shift in the ways in which we treat one another, but also in how we think about conflict and punishment, from a retributive to a restorative mindset

When these principles are followed, restorative justice can be dynamic, reflecting communities’ unique needs, cultures and creativity.